DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 280 959 CE 046 752

AUTHOR Wijemanna, E. L.
TITLE Vocational Subjects in the Secondary Grades--Sri Lanka's Experience.
INSTITUTION London Univ. (England). Inst. of Education.
PUB DATE May 86
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Vocationalising Education Conference (London, England, May 7-9, 1986).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Course Content; Developing Nations; *Educational Change; Educational Improvement; *Educational Philosophy; *Educational Trends; Foreign Countries; Handicrafts; International Education; Prevocational Education; Secondary Education; *Secondary School Curriculum; *Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS *Sri Lanka

ABSTRACT

Sri Lanka made three major attempts to establish vocationalized components within otherwise academic curricula in mainstream secondary schools during the last 30 to 40 years. The first of these was the "Handicrafts in Schools" program that started in the early 1950s. This program attempted to introduce woodworking and metal working for boys and cloth weaving and ceramics for girls in the secondary grades. The handicraft program was gradually phased out by the end of the 1960s after it was shown that it failed to provide needed skills and that it was seen as inferior to other curricula. The second attempt was the program of Pre-Vocational Studies that came in as a significant feature of the 1972 Reforms in General Education. The Pre-Vocational Studies program began in 1976. However, little attention was paid to the vast scope of the program, with the result that standard curricula were not developed and schools were instead encouraged to innovate. Such an approach, directed to schools that had always had direction from the top, was bound to fail. It was replaced with the third effort, the still on-going project of Life Skills whereby a new technical/vocational subject is being designed and introduced to the first two grades in the secondary school, with assistance from UNESCO and the United Nations Development Program. (KC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

University of London Institute of Education
Department of International and Comparative Education

ED280959

VOCATIONALISING EDUCATION CONFERENCE

7-9 May, 1986

VOCATIONAL SUBJECTS IN THE SECONDARY GRADES -
SRI LANKA'S EXPERIENCE

E.L. Wijemanna

Ministry of Education, Battaramulla, SRI LANKA

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

F M Ellis

D C E

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CE046752

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Department of International and Comparative Education
University of London Institute of Education
20 Bedford Way, WC1H 0AL

Vocational Subjects in the Secondary Grades

- Sri Lanka's Experience

Sri Lanka records three major attempts "to establish vocationalized components within otherwise academic curricula in main stream Secondary Schools" during the last 3 to 4 decades. The first of these was the 'Handicrafts in Schools' programme that started in the early Fifties. This attempted to introduce Woodwork and metal work for boys and cloth weaving and ceramics for girls in the Secondary grades. The second was the programme of Pre-Vocational Studies that came as a significant feature of the 1972 Reforms in General Education. The third is the still on-going project of Life Skills whereby with UNDP/UNESCO assistance a new Technical/ Vocational subject is being designed and introduced to the first two grades in the Secondary School.

Handicrafts in Schools

Up to the early Fifties no Vocational/Technical subject was taught in the main stream Secondary Schools of the country. However, in a limited number of rural schools with secondary grades able craftsmen without any academic or pedagogical training were engaged in teaching a variety of crafts such as wood work, clay work, ratton work, laquor work, basket weaving and cloth weaving. They were not included as subjects for any public school examination. In the early Fifties of these subjects wood work and metal work for boys and cloth weaving and ceramics for girls were selected and under the guidance of specialists from abroad syllabuses and schemes of work giving details of instruction in the secondary grades were prepared. A standard type-plan workshop was designed and requirements of furniture, equipment and tools were standardized. Using foreign assistance about 200 Secondary Schools in different parts of the country were provided with well equipped large workshops for the teaching of these subjects. Specialist courses in Teacher Training were organized and these training courses were made attractive

....2/

by giving them the status of Secondary School Trained Teachers. A Specialist Inspectorate with senior supervisory staff was appointed for supervising the programme.

This carefully designed well provided and adequately managed programme got off to a good start and although it was not a compulsory subject for the G.C.E.(OL) Examination that came at the end of the first cycle of the Secondary Education, almost one-third of the number of pupils in schools with these newly provided workshops offered this subject for the examination. Wood work was by far the more popular among the boys and Cloth weaving among the girls. The curriculum content and the methodology of teaching adopted were the same as those of teaching these traditional Handicraft subjects. There was no attempt to work out possible integration across this subject and others like Mathematics, Science or Commerce. The School Workshop and the Handicraft Section stood apart as a separate unit in the Secondary School into which the pupils went during the periods allotted for the subject.

A major thrust for the expansion of Science teaching in the Secondary Grades together with development of new curricula in Science subjects came in the way of the Secondary Schools in the early Sixties. With this came specially designed Science laboratories, Science equipment, foreign expertise in the teaching of Science and special programmes of Teacher Training, preparation of textbooks and curricula, laboratory manuals etc. for the use of teachers in one rich comprehensive package for the extension and upgrading of Science teaching in Secondary Schools. As against Physics, Chemistry and Biology, Handicraft subjects - Wood work, Metal work, Cloth weaving and Ceramics were very poor competitiors in the school curriculum in the matter of recruiting pupils in the secondary grades. There was also the fact that while the Sciences led to the Universities and the prestigious professions of Medicine, Engineering etc. the Handicrafts did not open the way for entry even to the senior technical schools. These receded to the background and

by 1968 out of a total of 175,000 school candidates who sat the G.C.E.(OL) Examination only about 4000 offered a Handicraft subject although half this number of candidates came from schools with workshop facilities for the teaching of Handicraft subjects. By early Seventies Handicrafts as a subject in the Secondary grades had almost completely disappeared.

Pre-Vocational Education

The publication "Pre-Vocational Education in Sri Lanka" by W. Diyasena published in 1976 by the International Bureau of Education is the best account available of this major innovation in Education. The main chapters of this booklet are reproduced as Annexe I.

Annexe II - an article on "General Education: Some Development in the Sixties and prospects in the Seventies" that appeared in Vol. I No.4 of the MARGA Quarterly Journal in 1972 gives the background against which this innovative concept was conceived and implemented.

The present Government which came into power in 1977 reversed some of the Education Reforms introduced by the previous Government in 1972. Among these was the deletion of Pre-Vocational Studies from the curricula in the Secondary grades. This decision was welcome by both the public as well as educational circles, because the hasty, inadequately planned, poorly provided introduction of Pre-Vocational Studies into about 5000 schools with Secondary grades had resulted in serious disorder at the school level. A systematic investigation into the causes that led to the failure of the Pre-Vocational Studies Project has not so far been undertaken.

The present author was the one who wrote out the very first paper in which this new concept of Pre-Vocational Studies was presented and this was in April 1971. The main

....4/

thrust of this paper is captured in the following extract from the government's policy document - "The Five-Year Plan 1972-76" published in November 1971.

> "The main objective of the curricular change that is to be inaugurated from 1972 is to integrate the academic and vocational aspects of education in the general school system. It seeks to equip students with a good general education together with a basic familiarity with one or more vocational opportunities available to them. This does not mean any reduction in academic content. What it means is that the materials taught and the whole idiom of teaching has meaning for the student and will stand him in good stead when he leaves the system."

By this time the other significant features of the proposed reforms in General Education, such as the reduction of the Junior Secondary cycle from 5 years to 4 years and the introduction of a common curriculum into this segment thereby doing away with the three-fold curricular streaming into Arts, Science and Commerce that prevailed had been finalized. The implementation of this package of reforms was to commence with grade 6 in January 1972 in order to enable the completion of the first cycle of 4 years of the new Junior Secondary School and the holding of the first new National Certificate of General Education (NCGE) (which was to replace the G.C.E.(OL) examination) before the next Parliamentary Elections due in 1976. The first paper on the subject referred to earlier proposed that the 4 year Junior Secondary stage be divided for purposes of this new subject into two cycles of two years each, that modular approach be adopted in the development of curricular material and most importantly that this new subject be tried out on a pilot basis in a very limited number of schools before it could be extended to the entire school system.

.....5/

The decision makers at the top did not agree to these suggestions. It was argued that the new subject should figure prominently in the very first N.C.G.E. examination falling due in December 1975 and furthermore that in keeping with the important principle of one common curriculum all 5000 schools preparing students for this examination should commence teaching this subject in grade 6 from January 1972. The implications of this vast undertaking were not examined adequately. This unpardonable haste in launching such an immense programme was perhaps the biggest single factor contributing to its failure.

The central idea in the original concept of Pre-Vocational Studies was that of extracting curriculum content from vocations that obtain in the community. It promised not only enrichment of learning within the school through the use of academic knowledge in meaningful applications but also upgrading of occupations in the village through meaningful injections of selected academic knowledge into their activities. Presented in this manner the concept was very attractive to any audience. Very soon it became one of the main arguments used in the campaign that was undertaken to win over popular support for the new package of educational reforms. This campaign was so all absorbing and the rationale for Pre-Vocational Studies was so convincing that those at the helm of affairs failed to pay adequate attention to the all important task of extracting valid, workable and detailed curricular specifications that would achieve the objectives of the programme. Instead what was done was to ask the schools to prepare their own curricula. To some extent this was unavoidable for, the choice of the vocations for study by any school had to be left to the school itself. A few proto-types were made available but adequate detailed guidelines were not given simply because this was entirely new unknown territory. With such a large number of schools

.....6/

engaged in the teaching of the subject in a system in which schools had got accustomed to central direction to the last detail for long years this invitation to innovate was bound to fail.

Almost the whole of the organizational structure set up to implement the programme described by Mr. W. Diyasena were established too late. Mr. Diyasena says that the Curriculum design Committee at the centre "received nearly 4000 syllabuses (from schools) during the first quarter of 1973." Copies of examination syllabuses were made available to schools only by January 1974. These related to a 4 year course of which 2 years were already gone. The serious confusion that built up in the large majority of schools demoralized those engaged in the programme and its image in the country sank very low.

E. L. Wijemanna

Ministry of Education,
Battaramulla,
Sri Lanka.
05th May, 1986.